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SUBJECT: AMB TAHIR-KHELI HEARS INDIAN UNSC PITCH

Classified By: Charge Robert O. Blake, Jr., for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

11. (C) Summary: In meetings with senior MEA officials on May 26, Ambassador Shirin Tahir-Kheli, the Secretary's UN Reform Adviser, heard a strong Indian claim for a permanent UNSC seat, and identified peacekeeping, management and accountability reform, counterterrorism, nonproliferation and democracy promotion as common areas of interest for the US and India. GOI officials observed that both India and the US believe that the UN was not as effective as it could be, and welcomed input on US reform priorities, noting that an Indian permanent seat on the UNSC was the GOI priority. Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran emphasized India's extraordinary

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investment in its UNSC campaign and the need for the US to differentiate its position from China which is now viewed as opposing India's effort. He suggested that the outlines of UN reform could be finished by September, even if implementation will take longer. The GOI requested US support for its UNSC candidacy, arguing that this would be consistent with USG statements welcoming a larger Indian role in the world, and bemoaned the apparent Chinese campaign to obstruct UNSC expansion. End Summary.

UNSC Proposals

12. (C) MEA Additional Secretary (UN and International Security) Meera Shankar, leading an MEA delegation, told Ambassador Tahir-Kheli, PolCouns and Poloffs that the momentum for reform arising from the High-Level Panel (HLP) report and the UNSYG's report created a "unique opportunity" to shape a UN that would be "revitalized, more responsive, and more representative." In a separate conversation, FS Saran emphasized that India has "invested huge political capital to get this far" in its campaign for a Security Council seat, adding that the GOI has to "try to get this through before anything else" and that "if it doesn't materialize then all is lost." Summarizing his view of US policy, Saran suggested the US should recognize that the UNSC structure does not reflect the current international situation, and that other countries, like India, need to be "accommodated."

13. (C) The FS suggested that US and Indian reform efforts converge in two important areas, which should form a basis for cooperation. First, both countries are looking at UNSC enlargement in the overall context of UN reform. Secondly, as part of Security Council reform, the US must also believe that expansion is necessary, although it is "unclear" how Washington wants to expand.

14. (C) Shankar stated that the G-4 framework resolution for UNSC expansion was "sensitive to P-5 concerns," and was still under review as the G-4 sought to win co-sponsors to its approach. Although India still prefers a "clean slate" of identified candidates for permanent seats in the draft resolution, the Africa's inability to settle on two candidates required the current approach proposing new seats for regions, but not countries. She added, however, that election by secret ballot for UNSC membership would more transparently endorse the selection of the self-proclaimed candidates, and meet the "norms of democracy."

15. (C) Decrying what she called a "lack of legitimacy and ineffectiveness" at the UN, Shankar stated that UNSC expansion is "intrinsic" to comprehensive UN reform. Asserting that many member states believe UN reform without UNSC expansion will not "revive their faith" in the legitimacy of the UN system, she noted that the proposal to add both permanent and non-permanent members was one that would attract a maximum of support in the UNGA. Extension of veto power to new permanent members is a "principled position," Shankar said, stressing that India's stance has been determined at the highest levels of government and Parliament. However, she noted, the G-4 had toned down its draft language from "shall" have the veto to "should" as a concession to P-5 concerns.

Problems from China

16. (C) Saran and Shankar both emphasized that China's "activism" against any UNSC expansion was a concern to the G-4. In reaction to the GOI's success in joining the G-4 and

securing UNGA member state assurances of support, China had "pulled out all the stops" to prevent an Indian seat, Saran said. He admitted that India had been at the bottom of the aspirants list until New Delhi joined the G-4, which made it a credible candidate. The G-4 had raised India's profile in a way that was not possible alone. Saran noted that as recently as early May, China never thought India's candidacy would progress this far, on the grounds that the G4 could not agree on a Framework Resolution or that India would not gather enough support.

17. (C) Since these developments, China has "gone all out" on the offensive against the GOI, even incorrectly suggesting that their views coincided with the rest of the P5, Saran observed. Expressing his understanding that the US position was not in line with the Chinese and not out of line with India, Saran suggested it would be "worthwhile and helpful for the US to reiterate these differences." The Foreign Secretary called the threat of the Coffee Club "incidental

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compared to the Chinese."

18. (C) Pointing out that China obtained its UNSC seat under the 2/3 support requirement, Shankar argued that any new permanent members should need only an equivalent level of UNGA support. She argued that the US should support addition of both permanent and non-permanent seats, and reject the Chinese proposal that new candidates needed 90% backing in the UNGA. She added that "it is not becoming to a country like the US to be seen in the same camp as China" in blocking expansion.

19. (C) Ambassador Tahir-Kheli stressed to the Foreign Secretary that there were many differences between the US and

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Chinese views on reform and we should not be lumped together. Saran acknowledged this and complained that China has been "playing games" with its support for India. By making reform conditional on consensus, their earlier statement of support for India is made hollow. He added that Chinese support for Plan B (addition of non-permanent seats only) "negates the idea of greater representation in the Security Council."

110. (C) Saran warned that the US and China might appear to have similar approaches if the US does not clearly articulate its distinct position. If the US signals that there might be difficulties in the Framework Resolution but is proactive about reform and not opposed to expansion with a two-thirds majority, this would separate the US from the Chinese. Any Indian perception that the US and China were working together would then disappear. In Saran's view, such a statement would support India's aspirations without compromising the US position, and it would distinguish the US from those "trying to wreck the G-4." Although the US may not accept the G4 in its current form, Saran repeated several times the hope that the US would publicly support UNSC expansion in principle.

How Far Does Support for Japan Go?

111. (C) Ambassador Tahir-Kheli pointed out to Saran that the most obvious difference between the Chinese and US positions is that the US openly supports a Japanese seat, while the Chinese are using their protest against the Japanese as a basis for stifling all reform. Saran acknowledged this difference but wondered how far the US would be willing to go for Japan. He asked hypothetically whether the US would "still support Japan or give it up" to prevent unwanted changes if the US has to make other compromises on UNSC composition.

New Responsibilities

112. (C) According to Shankar, the GOI recognizes that any new permanent members of the UNSC would need to carry a larger share of the financial burden, but did not specify India's view on what level of the UN assessment would be appropriate. She pointed out that India fulfills some of its responsibility to play a leading role by contributing large numbers of troops to UN peacekeeping operations (PKO), and said India could be an even more substantial contributor to PKO if it had a seat on the UNSC.

Convergent Interests?

113. (C) Claiming that an Indian permanent seat would not be contrary to US interests, Shankar listed several areas of convergence between USG and GOI interests in the UN. These include:

-- Democracy promotion;

-- Counterterrorism;
-- Nonproliferation of WMD and their means of delivery;
-- Peacekeeping and peace support operations, including support for a new peacebuilding commission.

14. (C) Responding to USG priorities for UN reform, Shankar stated that India supports management reform of the UN, noting that the GOI has also called for increased accountability, transparency and efficiency in UN operations. Agreeing with the need for greater flexibility in personnel and resource management for the Secretariat, she suggested that member states first ensure increased accountability and transparency before approving more flexibility. She agreed on the need to review mandates after five years, observing that rule 5.6 already requires the SYG to do so, but that it has not been followed in the past.

15. (C) Supporting the proposed Peacebuilding Commission, Shankar welcomed continued discussions on its details and stated that it was important to "get the details right the first time." She suggested that the commission be located in ECOSOC, but noted that the GOI was open to alternative suggestions. Shankar agreed to "look carefully" at US proposals for reforming the UNCHR but reaffirmed India's support for human rights and dislike of country-specific resolutions. The new body must be more focused toward capacity building in countries with poor human rights records, not simply highlighting abuses, she said. She also suggested that a new human rights organization should have a role in restoring democracy in countries where it has been overthrown. Linking UNCHR reform to UNSC enlargement, she argued that in both bodies developing countries see the developed world "sitting in judgment" on their failings, instead of assisting them to progress, and said that UNSC expansion would help orient the overall UN objectives to be more supportive of developing state needs.

Timeline for Reform -----

16. (C) The Foreign Secretary explained that two matters shaped the UNSC reform timeline. First, India needed a "degree of confidence" that it would receive two-thirds UNGA support needed for the UNSC seat. Otherwise, the timeline was "dependent on the P5 position," he said, underlining how important the US position is for India. Saran explained that although India had at one time collected 140 votes of support for its UNSC seat, he believed China in the meantime "scared other countries into backing out," and now the GOI was in a "holding operation" to return to this level of support.

17. (C) Saran agreed with Ambassador Tahir-Kheli that much work needed to be done by September in order to create a consensus on any reforms and understood that the US was concerned about the timeline moving too fast. Nevertheless, he hoped that all nations could capitalize on the momentum for reform and not defer needed changes. He described overall confidence in the UN "at an all time low," adding that if change did not happen now, attitudes towards the UN would only worsen. While he agreed that the implementation process would be lengthy, he stated that we "should declare the landmark decisions" at September's UNGA.

Strategists: The Veto Dilemma -----

18. (SBU) Reinforcing the challenges facing the GOI, a cross section of retired Ambassadors and strategic thinkers agreed over dinner in honor of Ambassador Tahir-Kheli that pragmatists in the strategic community would consider a permanent UNSC seat a success even without a veto. However, they called the disconnect between this quietly-held goal and public opinion (shared by many in Parliament) that a veto is the "minimum acceptable offer" a serious dilemma for the government. They noted that domestic pressure will make it difficult for the government to compromise. However, the GOI did not express this view to us in official meetings.

Comment -----

19. (C) The Foreign Secretary's emphasis on the political capital India has spent to get to this stage in its UNSC quest indicates that it will be difficult for the GOI to take "no" as an answer on both a permanent seat and a veto. While it seems to be going for broke to attain a place at the international high table, the GOI is nervous about the implications if it fails and is hesitant to burn bridges with its traditional NAM partners, which accounts in large measure for its continuing rhetoric and developing country solidarity, even while claiming that it has stepped up to a larger global role.

20. (C) The GOI certainly recognizes that this issue is more

complicated than former NSA Brajesh Mishra recently put it when he told a journalist that the US could help India most to become a global power by supporting it for a seat in the UNSC. However, the FS noted that the Secretary's remarks in New Delhi that the US recognizes the regionally important role of India and the need for UN reform have created expectations of US support for a UNSC permanent seat. Many decision-makers in India will be bitterly disappointed if this support does not materialize. End comment.

Participants

121. (U) Participants in the MEA meetings were as follows:

US:

Ambassador Shirin Tahir-Kheli, Senior Advisor to the Secretary for UN Reform

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Charge Robert O. Blake Jr. (Saran only)
Geoff Pyatt, PolCouns
Jai Nair, Poloff
Courtney Kramer, Poloff

Indian:

Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran
Meera Shankar, Additional Secretary, UN and International Security
S Jaishankar, Joint Secretary, Americas
Hamid Ali Rao, Joint Secretary, UN Political
Manjeev Puri, Joint Secretary, UN Economic and Social
Pankaj Sharma, Deputy Secretary, UN Political
K Nandini, Under Secretary, UN Political
Siddarth Nath, Attache, UN Political

122. (U) Ambassador Tahir-Kheli has cleared this message.

BLAKE